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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on electronic office hour consultations and investigates the presence and organization of pragmatic elements associated with negotiating the completion and evaluation of coursework in the e-mail messages of 28 American and international students to an American professor. Findings indicate a lack of negotiation skills in the international students' messages, which might give them a disadvantage in completing coursework successfully. Specific research questions include the following: "What features of negotiation distinguish native speakers (NS) and non-native speakers (NNS)?" "What determines more efficient negotiation in online conferences between students and professors?" Six tables, five bar charts, and 49 references are included. (Author/KFT)

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Could We Talk?: Pragmatic Variations in Student-Professor Negotiations

Paper presented at AAAL 2000, 12 March, Vancouver

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This study of electronic office hour consultations investigates the presence and organization of pragmatic elements associated with negotiating the completion and evaluation of course work in the e-mail messages of American and international students to an American professor. Findings indicate a lack of negotiation skills in the international students' messages, which might disadvantage them in terms of completing work successfully.

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INTRODUCTION

The prominence and significance of negotiation in all facets of life—from the nearly proverbial bargaining of adolescents for keys to the family car, to clenching a business deal with a new client, to concluding an international treaty between warring nations—are evident everyday. Although the form and substance of negotiation vary from one context to another (culture, register, sector), all negotiation entails the use of persuasion to influence one party's actions or beliefs which determine the actions or beliefs of another party (Boden 1996, Firth 1996, Young 1991).

Negotiations between students and professors exhibit the same essential characteristics and can carry relatively high stakes (the completion of a degree which may determine one's livelihood). Effective negotiation of course work, theoretical issues, and administrative matters can gain students respect which may in turn lead to other benefits. This is especially true of graduate students, especially upper division graduates, who are expected to become independent scholars who can take initiative for their own work while maintaining a tutorial relationship with their professors. While there is a fairly large body of literature on classroom communication which involves the "negotiation" of meaning of course content, the word "negotiation" as used in this context is used liberally to refer to the clarification of ideas. Much of this research focuses on group interactions and the conveyance of information from instructor to student rather than actual negotiation.

There is another body of research which investigates the nature of student-professor negotiation in face-to-face advising sessions (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1990, 1993a, 1993b; Hartford & Bardovi-Harlig 1992) and which offers insights into the linguistic and pragmatic features of student-professor negotiation which define the negotiation as status-appropriate or not. Of particular interest to this study are Bardovi-Harlig and Harford's conclusions regarding the divergent negotiation skills of native English-speakers (NSs) and non-native English-speakers (NNSs). They found that linguistic features of some NNSs' negotiations were sociolinguistically inappropriate given the status difference between the student and professor. The use of such "incongruent" language led to misunderstandings and irritations which clouded the communication and tarnished the image the professors developed of the students.

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As computer technology is integrated into the classroom—whether for fully distance education courses or for the more common addition of e-mail in traditional classroom courses—more student-professor communication nowadays is occurring in electronic form rather than face-to-face. Some of this communication is negotiation between students and professors, including the negotiation of topics for papers, the submission and evaluation of work, the fulfillment of administrative requirements for program completion (Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth, 1999). A number of interesting questions are raised by the use of technology to negotiate in contrast to face-to-face negotiation. Researchers working within the field of linguistics have been investigating the possible differences between electronic discourses and face-to-face discourses and have identified a number of distinguishing features (cf. Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth forthcoming, Davis & Brewer 1997).

Similar findings have been made specific to variations in negotiation carried out via computer-mediated media versus face-to-face interactions. Working within the field of counseling where computer technologies have only recently begun to be employed to negotiate solutions with advisees, Watts (1996) notes differences in advisee-advisor negotiation. These differences include more positive attitudes toward computer-mediated guidance, especially on the part of "individuals with relatively stable goals and a relatively strong sense of independence" (Kivlighan *et al.*, 1994 as noted in Watts 1996 276). However, Watts also noted the danger of "dehumanization" of the counseling process as a disadvantage of computer-mediated counseling.

As the field of negotiation was being established, Bell (1988) noted that, "research on face-to-face communication indicates that a great deal of meaning is conveyed nonverbally by facial expression, body language, etc. The 'complete' study of negotiation would include an assessment of the importance of this factor. If the negotiation is not occurring directly, we must assess the impact of the medium through which it does take place" (p. 240). Accordingly, a number of negotiation researchers have found significant differences in electronic and face-to-face negotiation (Barkhi, Jacob & Pirkul 1999, Benbunan-Fich & Hiltz 1999, Ocker & Yaverbaum 1999, Rhee *et al.* 1995). While these studies focus on non-linguistic aspects of negotiation—such as negotiation efficiency and use of power/authority—they nonetheless suggest that computer-mediated and face-to-face negotiation vary linguistically as well.

Firth (1996) points out the lack of linguistic research of negotiation,

> "...there is...a veritable dearth of studies that address the discursive and interactional natures of the phenomenon [negotiation], let alone reproduce and examine transcripts of recordings of negotiation...In the majority of existing research, language has been ignored, or relegated to the status of a manipulable independent variable, on par with, though no more significant than, variables such as the negotiator's behavioral disposition... negotiating tactics...and the disclosure of specific types of information" (p. 8).

The present study addresses the two research areas of negotiation discourse identified above. It involves an analysis of computer-mediated negotiation from a linguistic perspective. More specifically, it is designed to provide answers to the following questions: Does the on-line negotiation of NSs and NNSs differ, and how does it differ? How might any differences advantage/disadvantage either group?

METHODS

The data analyzed in the present study comprised a subset of a set of 125 initial, student-initiated e-mail messages sent by native (NSs) and non-native speakers (NNSs) of English to one American university professor. Only student-initiated messages were considered since (1) this was expected to mirror the initiative a student would demonstrate by coming to a face-to-face office hour, and (2) it was expected that there would be differences in the form this approach would take for NSs and NNSs. In an earlier analysis (Biesenbach-Lucas & Weasenforth, 1999), the lack of – and relative lack of development of – negotiations seemed to distinguish NSs from NNSs, suggesting that a closer investigation of e-mail messages was warranted. The subset of data investigated here consisted of 42 student-initiated messages which were set apart from the larger data set by their use of identified negotiation moves. Of these messages, 28 were written by 19 NSs and 14 were written by 9 NNSs. Table 1 provides the cultural affiliation of the NNSs included in this research.

Table 1: Non-Native Students in Present Study	
Korean	4
Taiwanese	1*
Total Asian Students	**5**
Hispanic	3
French	1
Total non-Asian Students	**4**
* Only undergraduate included in study	

Definitions

Using definitions from the negotiation literature, the students' e-mail messages were examined for presence or absence of the following negotiation moves:

Context – background as to what a specific proposal refers to. Lebow (1996 11) points out the importance of providing context as a means of "reducing uncertainty" in negotiations. Nierenberg (1973) discusses its importance in "prepar[ing] ground before asking questions" (p. 111).

Proposal – a suggestion regarding completion of course work, project ideas, appointment time, submission of work. The literature identifies proposals as an essential element of any type of negotiation. While Bell (1988) refers to them as "goals", Lebow (1996), Maynard (1984) and others refer to them as "preferences" or "proposals". Gray, Purday & Bouwen refer to proposals as "outcome frames" (Gray, Purday & Bouwen 1990, p. 9-10 as cited in Bell 1996, p. 55)

Justification – reasons the student provides his/her proposal. Nierenberg (1973) discusses the importance of providing justification to "prepare ground before asking questions" (p. 111).

Options – alternative suggestions made as part of a proposal. Fisher & Ury (1981 as cited in Firth 1996) recommend the provision of alternative solutions as a maxim for successful negotiation. Keeney & Raiffa (1991) argue that it is necessary to "generate a variety of possibilities before deciding what to do" (p. 142) in a negotiation.

Request for information – questions as to what the student needs to know from the professor. Lebow (1996) notes that the "exchange of information" is critical to negotiation. Nierenberg (1973) notes the "use of questions is a powerful negotiation tool" (p. 110), specifically being one way of controlling the course of negotiation.

Request for response – an explicit signal that the student is expecting the professor to respond to his/her message. Nierenberg (1973) points out that one use of this particular type of question is to bring a negotiation move to a conclusion.

Request for other – the student asks for permission to the proposal or is requesting the professor for some action.

Below is one student's e-mail message which exhibits the negotiation moves defined above. Options are identified with underlining.

Message NS16

Subject: **[Context>**final project/ELT I**<Context]**

Hello Dr. X,

[Proposal>I am interested in studying the topic of attrition of a second language as my final project for your class.**<Proposal] [Justification>**You brought up the subject a couple of times marginally and I really think it is interesting to learn more about how we lose proficiency in a second language through lack of use.**<Justification] [Request for permission>**I'm hoping this topic will be appropriate in the context of this class (ELT I).**<Request for permission] [Justification>**I think it has application in our course of study because TESOL instructors could benefit from understanding which skills are the most vulnerable to attrition.**<Justification]**

It is a little difficult for me to meet you during your normal office hours and time is limited after class on Tuesday nights. **[Request for response>**I do need to get your feedback on this**<Request for response]** and **[Context>**I also need to make sure all my ducks are in order to receive my TESOL Certificate next semester.**<Context] [Proposal>**I would like to take either "Structure of English" or "Culture…".**<Proposal]** but **[Request for information>**I'm not sure if I need to fulfill one more required class or not.**<Request for information]**

[Proposal>I wonder if I could meet with you after work this Wednesday or Thursday at 5:00.**<Proposal] [Request for information>**Are you free at either of those timers?**<Request for information]**

Thanks.

Xxxx Xxxx

Quantitative Analysis

Following Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth (1999), the students' e-mail messages were categorized according to the following communication topics: setting up an appointment, submission of work, and assignment topic/course work. This allowed to infer the primary communicative purpose of each message. Each message was then parsed by negotiation move (context, proposal, justification, options, request for information, request for response and other requests). Finally, the sentences constituting each move were divided into clauses in order to arrive at an objective means of measuring the degree to which each move was developed. This quantitative part of the present study was carried out by two raters to assure reliability.

Qualitative Analysis

The negotiation subcategories were examined for the linguistic realization of each move, i.e. modals, intensifiers, hedges, downgraders, and other lexical items associated with each move were identified by two raters (cf. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford 1990, 1993a, 1993b).

RESULTS

Quantitative Results

Our results show a striking difference between NSs and NNSs with respect to the main purpose of their negotiation by communication topic (Table 2; Figure 1). While a quarter of the NS messages deal with a negotiation of either appointment making and submission of work, only 14% of the NNS messages negotiate an appointment with the professor while half the messages negotiate the submission of (late) work. As for negotiation of assignment topics or course work, 40% of the NS messages pursue this goal while only 29% of the NNS messages address topic related concerns. The preoccupation of these NNSs in negotiating a late submission and required permission from the professor, as opposed to the NSs' use of e-mail as an additional way to obtain instructor feedback on substantive issues may point to cultural differences between NSs and NNSs with respect to what both groups consider is appropriate or feasible to discuss in non-face-to-face situations. This also points to the fact that due to NSs' exploitation of e-mail as a convenient way to get in touch with their professor, NSs may increase their chances of successfully completing course requirements.

Table 2: Number and Percentage of Messages Including Negotiation by Communication Topic

	Native Speakers N=28		**Non-Native Speakers N=14**	
Communication Topic	**N**	**%**	**N**	**%**
Appointment	7	**25**	2	**14**
Submission of work	8	**29**	7	**50**
Topic/Course Work	11	**40**	4	**29**
Other	3	11	2	14

Figure 1: Percentage of Texts with Negotiation by Communication Topic

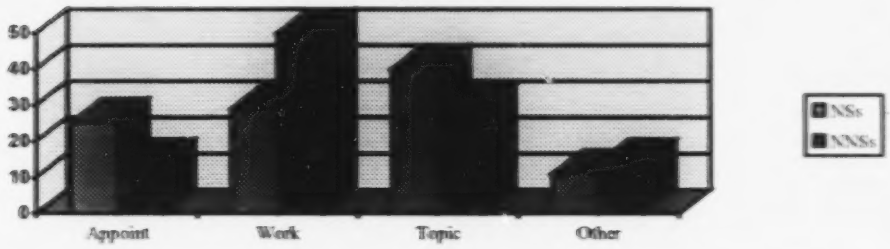
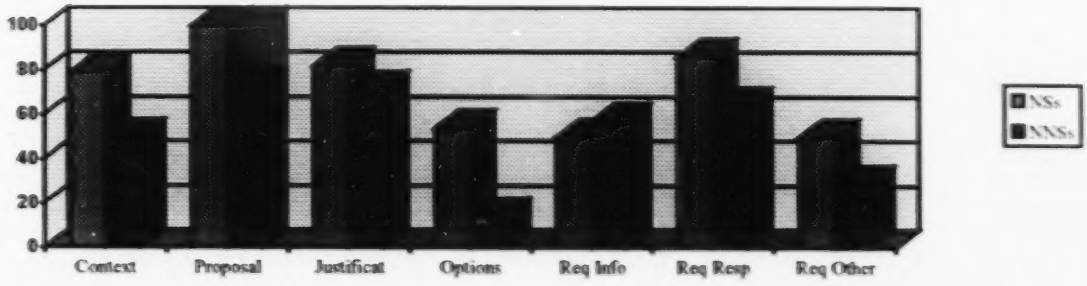


Table 3 and Figure 2 provide further insights into the different negotiation strategies of NSs and NNSs. An examination of the percentage of texts including negotiation moves shows that while all messages from NSs and NNSs include a proposal (the central move for the message to be included in this subset of data), there are clear differences in the use of the other moves. NSs tend to provide more context for their proposal, more justification, and they request a response from the professor more explicitly and more often. The most striking difference, however, concerns the use of options: while over half the NS negotiations provide alternative suggestions, only slightly more than 10% of the NNS messages contain options. Thus, the perception of greater effectiveness of NS speaker negotiations is in large part fueled by the greater initiative on their part in suggesting a course of action, thus demonstrating the independence expected of graduate students (cf. Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1990, 1993a, 1993b).

Table 3: Number and (Percentage) of Texts Including Negotiation Moves

Students	Context	Proposal	Justification	Options	Request for Info	Request for Response	Request for Other
Native	22 (79)	28 (100)	23 (82)	15 (54)	14 (50)	24 (86)	14 (50)
Non-Native	7 (50)	14 (100)	10 (71)	2 (14)	8 (57)	9 (64)	4 (29)

Figure 2: Percentage of Texts by Negotiation Move

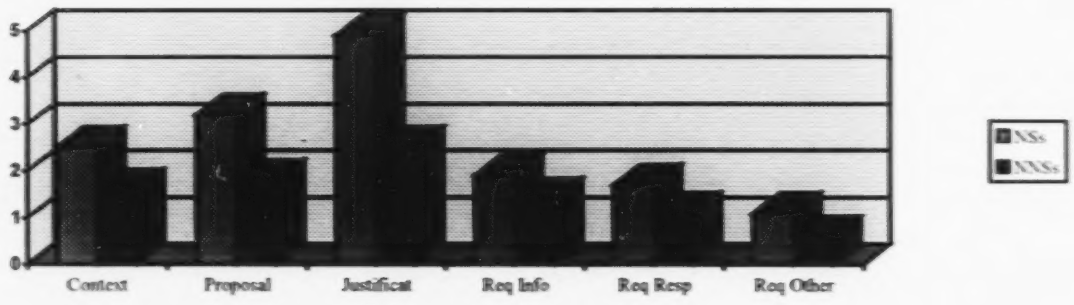


An examination of the clause-level development of each move in each message reveals that again there are great differences between NSs and NNSs (Table 4; Figure 3). In general, all negotiation moves show greater development of ideas as the average number of clauses per move indicates. This is particularly evident in the context, proposal, and justification moves. NSs expound a great deal of effort on justifying their proposal, but at the same time also tend to provide more detailed proposals. In terms of clause length, NS messages are twice as extensive as NNS messages. The benefit of providing more detailed information is clear: the more information the professor has, the better he/she is able to respond to the student's proposal and questions, and the more immediately the student can benefit from relevant feedback.

Table 4: Average Number of Clauses Associated with Negotiation Moves

Students	Context	Proposal	Justification	Request for Info	Request for Response	Request for Other
Native	2.5	3.2	4.9	1.9	1.7	1.1
Non-Native	1.6	1.8	2.5	1.4	1.1	0.6

Figure 3: Average Number of Clauses per Text by Negotiation Move



If electronic office hours are to be as effective as face-to-face office hours and serve as an adequate substitute, the negotiation of substantive matters is crucial. Therefore, we will now turn to a consideration of those student e-mail messages in which topic concerns are negotiated. Table 5 and Figure 4 show the percentage of messages including negotiation moves regarding assignments and course work. Figure 4 again shows the preponderance of the identified moves in NS messages. For four of the seven moves, the difference between NSs and NNSs is quite dramatic: while more than 75% of NS messages provide context and justification, only 50% of the NNS messages do the same. Similarly, while every other NS message provides options and explicit requests for response from the instructor, only one in 4 NNS messages does the same. An analysis of the number of clauses associated with topic/course work negotiation (Table 6; Figure 5) reveals that NSs elaborate substantially more on their proposals and justifications, and especially the context they provide. Thus, NSs provide much more information for the professor in this temporarily one-sided exchange, whose effectiveness seems to depend greatly on the student's ability to anticipate questions the professor may have regarding the proposal. Therefore, the elaboration of moves provides exactly that information which—if it was not provided—the professor would have to request from the student, thus prolonging the exchange and suspending any helpful feedback. In

contrast, rather than providing and initiating information, NNSs tend to request information from the professor by using inquiry.

Table 5: Number and (Percentage) of Messages Including Negotiation Moves for Topic/Course Work							
Students	**Context**	**Proposal**	**Justification**	**Options**	**Request for Info**	**Request for Response**	**Request for Other**
Native N=14	11 (78)	14* (100) *1=implicit	11 (78)	7 (50)	7 (50)	8 (57)	4 (28)
Non-Native N=4	2 (50)	4 (100)	2 (50)	1 (25)	2 (50)	1 (25)	1 (25)

Figure 4: Percentage of Texts with Negotiation of Topic/Course Work by Move

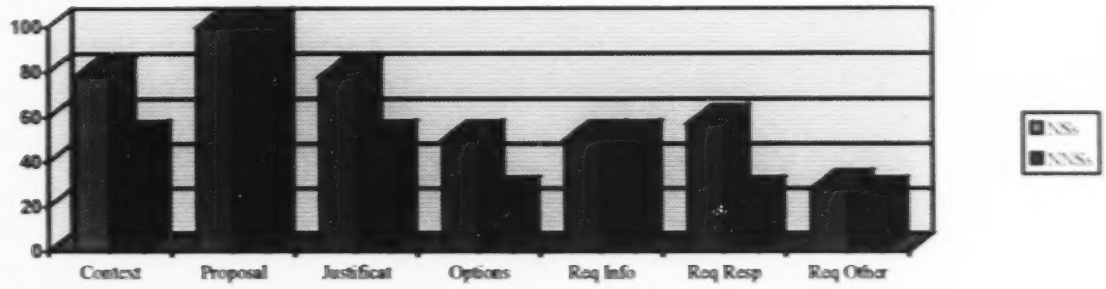
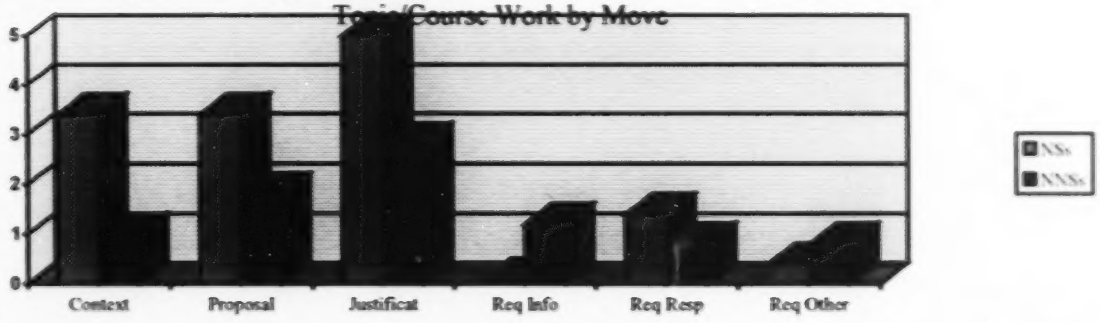


Table 6: Average Number of Clauses Associated with Negotiation of Topic/Course Work by Move						
Students	**Context**	**Proposal**	**Justification**	**Request for Info**	**Request for Response**	**Request for Other**
Native	3.4	3.4	5.0	0.1	1.4	0.4
Non-Native	1.0	1.8	2.8	1.2	0.8	0.8

Figure 5: Average Number of Clauses Associated with Negotiation of Topic/Course Work by Move



Qualitative Analysis

In the qualitative analyses completed for the study, we focussed on the linguistic realizations of two specific negotiation moves: proposals and requests for response. The reason for limiting our analysis to proposals is that the proposal move is an essential element of negotiation (Bell 1996, Andes 1992, Firth 1996, Lebow 1996), without which the messages under investigation would constitute merely inquiry rather than negotiation. Requests for response were investigated because they appeared to be associated more closely with the asynchronous nature of e-mail. That is, since the interlocutor is temporarily removed, an explicit request for a response may be necessary. This need may be greater, the longer the student's message is. In other words, a brief, to-the-point message ending in a request for information seems to have the perlocutionary force of a longer message necessitating a request for response.

Typical linguistic expressions used by NSs in proposals include hedging—using specifically "perhaps" and "maybe"—and modals (e.g., "I would like to", "I will"). In addition, NSs tend to provide options in their proposals; if no options are given, proposals tend to be more detailed as evidenced in the greater number of clauses in their proposals. Following are examples of the various linguistic realizations of these features:

> "Perhaps I could elaborate on that paper." (NS74)
>
> "Maybe I will try to both." (NS2)
>
> "I would take either [course name] or [course name]." (NS16)
>
> "I can either make revisions or work on new [lesson plans]." (NS74)
> "Perhaps I could explore to what extent grammar texts have became communicative and when that change began to occur." (NS12)

The tentativeness evident in these examples serves to maintain appropriate status differences between the student and the professor (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford 1990, 1993a, 1993b). On the one hand, the hedgings are markers of politeness conventionally associated with speaking to somebody of higher rank. On the other hand, while allowing flexibility for the professor in responding, the provision of options also preserves the status of the student as a developing scholar. Providing options demonstrates the initiative of the student as opposed to asking the professor to provide input. While providing options is one way for a student to preserve status, the presence of options alone does not indicate the extent of initiative the student has taken to develop his/her thoughts. Thus, elaboration in context, proposal, as well as justification moves appears to fulfill the same function.

In contrast, there is greater linguistic variety in the proposals of NNSs. Also, they typically do not include markers of tentativeness or options. Moreover, there is less development—evidenced in the number of clauses as discussed above—of their proposals than in the NSs'. For example:

> "I decide to write a research paper." (NNS1)
>
> "I am interested in TOEFL which I am familiar with." (NNS1)
>
> "I'm planning a student-centered communicative activity." (NNS10)

"I would very much like to include evaluations from my previous students." (NNS14)

Again as Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1990, 1993a, 1993b) note, NNSs' messages often lack the status-preserving hedging noted in NSs' messages. Furthermore, the lack of options, coupled with the vagueness and lack of elaboration of the proposals, can be interpreted as the result of a lack of initiative expected from graduate students.

The requests for response from NSs typically include the clause "Please let me know...", which appears to be the unmarked form in our sample (14/34 messages include this form). Lexical items (e.g., suggestions, advice, explanation, response) explicitly associated with response, and modals are also often used. Examples of these features can be found in the message excerpts which follow:

"Please let me know if you feel you need to see me..." (NS18)

"Let me know if this would be OK." (NS10)

"I'd appreciate any thoughts you may have on this." (NS2)

"If you could clarify that in e-mail...I would be very grateful." (NS27)

Similar to NSs, NNSs also use the phrase "Please let me know..." as the apparently unmarked form to solicit a response. Unlike the NSs, however, NNSs rarely use lexical items which explicitly solicit feedback from the professor in the form of suggestions, advice, explanation, and thoughts. Instead, they often explicitly solicit feedback by pleading using the word "help". For example:

"I really need your help." (NNS27)

"Please help me." (NNS42, 48, 49)

"I would be much obliged if you help me get the information." (NNS28)

Here, the NNSs portray themselves as helpless, needy students in contrast to the expectations for independence for graduate students. According to Gee (1999), NNSs call up an inappropriate cultural model, thus portraying themselves as needy, problem-plagued, and not very advanced students, which is quite the opposite of the attitudes graduate students need to demonstrate in American academic culture. Instead of appealing for the professor's charitable assistance, students need to ask for professional guidance, and NNSs apparently stress the former more than the latter. Another way in which the NNS requests for response in our sample are inappropriate is in the infelicitous transfer of genre conventions. Formal letter closings are used as well as intensified politeness features. For example:

"Il (sic) appreciate your kind help and consideration in advance." (NNS1)

"I am looking forward to your reply." (NNS36)

"I would be much obliged if..." (NNS28)

"Would you please let me know if there is no problem with my using the aforementioned video." (NNS10)

In general, the NS requests for response are appropriate to the situation and the medium. However, there are a few examples which appear to be infelicitous although for different reasons. Instead of emphasizing neediness, overuse of politeness features and genre transfer, some NS messages do note show status-preserving features and therefore may be interpreted as too assertive or too casual. For example:

"Your thoughts on this?" (NS9)

"Please advise." (NS45)

"I do need to get your feedback on this." (NS16)

DISCUSSION

What features of negotiation distinguish NSs and NNSs?:

As suggested in our previous study (Biesenbach-Lucas and Weasenforth, 1999), a greater proportion of NS messages than NNS messages contain negotiation moves, particularly with respect to the two communicative goals of setting up an appointment with the professor and discussing assignment topics/course work. Thus, NSs appear to be more adept at using e-mail technology as a means to extend the professor's available face-to-face office hours into a virtual arena, thereby increasing their chances for successful completion of course requirements.

In addition, the present study has shown that while the proposal move is included in all messages, a greater number of NS messages contain the other moves associated with negotiation. Likewise, these moves are more developed in NS messages. This is particularly important in the asynchronous e-mail medium. In a face-to-face negotiation, issues are not only jointly but also simultaneously addressed and evaluated. In contrast, the interlocutors in an e-mail exchange are removed in time and space; the student needs to build the negotiation independently by collapsing multiple moves into one initial message, anticipating the professor's questions, responses, and counterarguments. This is necessary for the negotiation to be efficient within this medium. If the student does not take the nature of e-mail into consideration, the negotiation exchange might be protracted over an unacceptable span of time, which might result in the student's needs not being addressed.

A further factor distinguishing between Ns and NNS messages is the language used to convey the students' proposals as well as their requests for the professor's response. The e-mails of NSs demonstrate the use of modal constructions and hedged expressions, which fulfill two purposes simultaneously: they maintain an appropriate status difference toward the professor while at the same time displaying the initiative, independence, and self-motivation expected of graduate students. Thus, NSs know how to attend to these two conflicting demands without placing undue pressure on the professor (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993a, 1993b; Gee 1999).

In contrast, the e-mails of NNSs do not show the same degree of attention to these two conflicting aspects of student-to-professor communication, which demonstrates a lack of appropriate pragmatic

competence and social language demanded by the situation. The demands of e-mail as a new technological genre are not recognized by most NNSs, as their inappropriate use of formal formulaics in an apparent attempt at applying conventions from a formal written genre implies. This lack of pragmatic competence is also evident in the frequent and inappropriate pleading for help from the professor, which demonstrates neither the attention to status nor the independent thinking expected of students (Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993a, 1993b).

The fact that NSs request a response from the professor more often and more explicitly than NNSs may imply that NNSs more frequently favor inquiry rather than negotiation (cf. Nierenberg 1973). In other words, NNS may not see it as appropriate to student status to propose matters related to their academic course work, believing that it is the professor's role to tell the student what to do (Gee 1999). This means that demonstration of initiative, valued positively by American professors, may be considered inappropriate by some NNSs. Similarly, the less frequent use of response requests may imply that NNSs consider it inappropriate to remind the professor that they are indeed expecting a response. NSs may use this proposal move to signal that they are trying to bring the proposal to a close (Nierenberg 1973).

What determines more efficient negotiation in on-line conferences between students and professors?:

An explicit, clear proposal couched in appropriate social and proposal language seems important in teacher-student conferences dominated by Western values. If the student's proposal is vague or too general, the student risks loss of status and may not get an appropriate and helpful response. By the same token, the provision of options in the students' proposals functions as a status-preserving move as it does not limit the professor's response while at the same time showing the student's self-motivation and ability to think through his/her proposal. In addition, depending on development and wording, options provide information that the professor can respond to, thus increasing the chances for the student to receive feedback on ideas proposed.

The e-mails of NSs are also in general more developed than those of NNSs, not only in terms of options, but also in terms of amount of language provided to give context and make the proposal, as the number of clauses demonstrates. Further, the NSs seem much more adept at raising counterarguments or anticipating concerns, questions, or objections that the professor may have within their e-mails, thus making their messages a more effective negotiation tool since the potential turns the negotiation may take are effectively addressed within one message.

In contrast, NNSs tended to follow a cultural model that might be acceptable within their cultural experiences, but not acceptable within American graduate studies culture (Gee 1999). In other words, by presenting themselves as students in need, the NNSs appear to call on the professor's moral obligation to help people in need rather than justifying the professor's investment of time in the students' professional guidance and initiation into the discourse of the field.

The data set analyzed in the present study has raised a number of intriguing points that might be the subject of further research. For example, it would be interesting to investigate whether or not the students' requests for response follow general conventions of letter writing (Danet 1999) in a new medium. However, they might also function as a status preserving move or a distancing move. It is plausible also that requests for response are used as a safeguard against the unreliability of the Internet and related communication venues. In addition, there appears to be evidence for cross-cultural differences in negotiation (Faure, 1993; Rubin & Sander, 1991), which might be replicated

or enhanced through the use of a relatively new medium for communication and negotiation, namely e-mail.

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